
Understanding Sociological Theory & The Sociological Imagination

Sociology involves stepping out of the box to analyze every custom, every tradition, every movement, every conversation that humans have. There are three sociological paradigms that we have been exposed to in this module: structural functionalism, conflict theory and symbolic interactionism. I see structural functionalism as a living organism. The purpose of this theory is to look at the whole 'organism', or society. An organism is very complex; every single organ has its own job that are vital to its function and survival. Just like an organism this theory sees society as a highly complex system in which all parts work together to promote stability and order (.....). Structural functionalism looks at society from a macro-sociological stand, meaning that it looks at the big picture.

The next theory, Conflict theory also has a macro-level approach. This theory looks at society like a power struggle. It sees different groups of people in different social classes competing for resources (...). The conflict theory basically suggests that society is a place for conflict based on inequalities and also that social structures help some people in society while limiting others. I do want to take time to talk a little more about this theory and some examples I have thought of while learning more about it. Even when you look at this theory from a 'business' point of view it is very reasonable. Different companies compete with one another to be on top, employees compete with one another to get raises and to be praised more than the other. Even in families, you can see this type of conflict and power struggle. You have the older siblings who want to be the parents of the younger siblings, the grandparents trying to have a say in how their grandchildren are raised, and the parents who want to compete for the most authoritative figure in the household. We also see these type of conflicts in race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, etc.

The third theory is symbolic interactionism. This theory looks at society from a small scale approach (micro), focusing on the everyday interactions between individuals. Depending on how we interact with different people, ideas, and events; we change. We mold into the person that we are depending in what we have been through and what we have been taught. One person might see a dog as a rabid animal because of a bad experience they had as a child while another person might see a dog as a sweet and cuddly pet.